

Ad Te Levavi
3 December, Anno Domini 2017
St. Matthew 21:1-9
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas, like most holidays, has become more of a habit than a celebration – we put up decorations, we sing our favorite hymns and carols, we gather together with friends and family, we drive to church at 7:00 at night to hold our little candles and sing “Silent Night.” All these things seem to bring us comfort more because it's what we've always done, rather than the truth of what lies behind them. Christmas is almost more about nostalgia than it is about serious contemplation of the fact that the eternal Son of God, the Second person of the Holy Trinity, joined Himself to our sinful flesh in order to redeem us.

But it seems there is something else very important that is ignored or at least taken for granted. Jesus came! God Himself came down from heaven and was born of the Virgin Mary. That simple fact, that the Lord of all creation, the perfect and holy God, would so humble Himself as to take on human flesh, defies all logic and explanation. St. Paul was right to call it a mystery.

Now that might not be such a big deal if we were all perfect. We would have nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of. It would be the Garden of Eden all over again walking with God in the cool of the day. Many theologians have wondered if the Son of God would have taken on flesh whether we fell into sin and needed saving or not. It's an interesting question that is fun to think about, but not one that has any real consequence because the reality is that we **did** fall into sin and we **do** need salvation. Our hearts are full of distrust, anger, doubt, and selfishness. We speak thoughtless and cruel words. We revel in the downfalls of our enemies. We fill God's ears with shallow excuses why we treat the gifts of life and salvation as less important than our jobs, our families, our sports, and our laziness. We try to quietly withdraw ourselves from those who are suffering, struggling, and weak.

So suddenly the idea of God coming down to be with us is really a terrifying prospect. Shame doesn't even begin to describe the absolute horror of standing before God completely exposed like Adam and Eve. There aren't enough leaves in the forest to cover up all of our sin and guilt before God. It's always safer to think of God somewhere far away, much like we would rather break up with somebody over an e-mail or call someone with bad news, rather than have to confront them

face-to-face. Suddenly, with the prospect of standing before God, all of our best efforts and our trying and our good works lose their shine. We actually have to see them for what they really are, filthy rags tainted by our selfishness, our doubt, and our greed.

Repent. Jesus has come. He has come to once again walk among us. The strange thing is, we don't have to hide. Jesus didn't come to condemn us as we deserve. Jesus didn't come to shake his finger at us and hold all of our sin against us. And that's really what throws us off about the true God. He just doesn't do the things that we think He should do or act in a way that we think He should act. He's not the God that we imagine Him to be. That's why we find it strange that he's riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. That's why the Pharisees just could not get over the fact that Jesus ate with prostitutes and tax collectors and all the dregs of society. If we were alive at the time, we probably would have had the exact same reactions as the Pharisees. God should only want to be around good people. But we think that because we think we're good. We live under the delusion that we have somehow stepped above sin and conquered temptation. Or perhaps we don't. Maybe you are afraid of God, terrified because you very acutely feel your unworthiness. Maybe you can't imagine that Jesus would want to have anything to do with you...or worse. But Jesus comes for sinners.

That's why he came. That is the miracle of Christmas – not only that Jesus came, but that He came to have mercy. God came to be with us so that he could save us, so that he could save you and me. Blessed is he, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is He who has stirred up the great power of His love and approaches us in the wreckage of our lives – in our loneliness, our despair, our arrogance, our guilt, and our shame. Blessed is He who bore in His divine humility the burden of all our sin so that we don't have to be terrified of God's judgment against us. Because of that little baby born to the lowly virgin Mary, we can now actually rejoice that God comes to his people, that he is not a God who stands far away from us and leaves us to die in the filth of our own mess. The incomprehensible depth of His love drove Him to come to live among us, to walk among us, to be one of us, and to die for us.

Daughter of Zion, behold your King. He has come to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on the colt the foal of a beast of burden. He comes not to conquer you but to conquer your enemies. He comes to you in the flesh today, humble mounted on a bit of bread and a drink of wine to conquer the weakness and doubt that remain. He comes to reassure you that His love is for you, whatever your sin may be, however you are tortured by it, however impossibly dark and vile it seems.

And He will come again in the flesh, but no longer humble. When He comes again He will come in all His glory and majesty to judge both the living and the dead. He won't be riding on a beast of burden, but on the clouds of heaven surrounded by legions of angels. But you have nothing to fear because the blood of Jesus has made you clean. When Jesus comes again on the last day all of God's people, all those who call upon him, who, with lamps full of the oil of hope, have looked forward for His return, who humbly confess their sins, and rejoice in the God who was slain, YOU, will raise your victory shouts of Hosanna and march triumphantly behind your Lord into the gates of eternal life where you will bask forever in the presence of the God who comes. Blessed is He who has come to save us!

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!

In the name of +Jesus.